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Higher Education in Transformation  
Conference, Ontario, 2016

2016

## Change in Higher Education: Reflecting on Culture and Identities in DIT

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### Recommended Citation

Conway, A. (2016) Change in Higher Education: Reflecting on Culture and Identities in DIT. *Higher Education in Transformation Symposium*, Oshawa, Ontario, Canada, November 2 - 4.

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# CULTURE AND IDENTITIES IN DIT

Change in Higher Education: Reflecting on Culture and Identities in DIT

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Presented at the Higher Education in Transformation Symposium

November 2 - 4, 2016 in Oshawa, Ontario, Canada

### Abstract

The case study is based on review of government policies and institutional strategy documents looking towards the future and determining how they are affecting the current situation in the Institution. The primary aim of the research was to identify drivers of change and mergers in higher education. This was conducted via analysis of interviews and observations at meetings and classes, and via use of discourse analysis of some policy and strategy documents. It was then reflected on how changes and mergers impact on cultures and professional academic identities. The interviewees were asked about their views on which factors bring about strategic change from both external and internal drivers and how these drivers impact on their own culture and professional academic identities. They also discussed possible future mergers in higher education.

*Keywords:* Higher Education Change, Culture, Identities, Case Study, Policy Documents, Narratives

## Chang in Higher Education: Reflecting on Culture and Identities in DIT

### **Introduction**

The principle aim of this research is to understand the effects of higher educational change and mergers on academic and pedagogic cultures and subsequent impacts on professional academic identities. Subsequently the paper will review the methods explored and employed by the research. Discussion of the findings provided a mechanism to develop and adapt models to provide a clear understanding of the research and its purpose. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are made.

### **Higher Education and Change**

According to Lewis (2014), change in higher education is not new, but the pace of change and the drivers of change are. Giddens (2003) and Nair (2003) state that change is a result of a combination of the economic, technological, socio-cultural and political processes, with the dominant driving force being economic. Doherty, Steel, and Parrish (2012) endorse this and offer a simple, yet effective, model of analysis referred to as the PEST (political, economic, socio-cultural, technological) analysis of macro drivers of change (see Table 2.1, Appendix 1). This suggests that government policies influence higher education institutions. These policies refer to budget availability, new student focus for recruitment, and new ways and means of learning and teaching because of the new generations of students, and subsequent increased need for flexibility.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) face consolidation due to the impacts from a myriad of internal and external forces of change (Cuthbert, 2008). Most institutions here and in Europe face elements of downsizing, and mergers, to provide for more efficiency (Harkin and Hazelkorn, 2014; Neary, 2007) and policy alignment (Drowley, Lewis & Brooks, 2013; Locke, 2009; Cuthbert, 2008). These arise from the complex issues of technological advances, subsequent increasing competition and internationalisation, economic instability

and cost cutting efficiencies, socio-cultural changes within staffing, incoming students, and other stakeholders issues, and political and government policies directly or indirectly affecting higher education. In Ireland, government policies for higher education emanate via the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the DoES (Department of Education and Science). In addition, European policy initiatives relating to higher education are evident via Bologna<sup>1</sup> and PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), and internationally via OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) reports.

Because economic and social policy is to a degree regulated by the global environment the choices adopted by organisations are to some extent constrained, (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002), for example, higher education institutions have no choice but to change if higher education is to survive and prosper in recessionary times, as no longer is higher education isolated from societies as it once was. It is frequently remarked that education should be central to communities, and if communities are to emerge from the recession, education has to be at the forefront of this change in the economy.

Mergers represent one of the most difficult processes of both planned and unplanned change occurring in higher education institutions today, as the HEA has continuously encouraged collaborations and alliances, which have resulted in a number of proposed mergers to form the new Technological Universities (TU). Chandler (2013) and Barber, Barber, Donnelly, and Rizvi (2013) suggest that higher education is no exception to change as traditional boundaries move and education requires adapting to modern technologies, changing demographics and academic interests. The following sections outline the rationale and relevance of the study reviewing the higher education sector and providing a research question to direct the research.

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<sup>1</sup>Bologna is a European wide education policy and agreement aligning its education systems for greater coherency and convergence. For more see: <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=31>

**Higher Education in Ireland and some Policies**

Enrolments in higher education in Ireland increased rapidly throughout the whole period 1970-2010 (Delaney & Healy, 2014) but this was not equaled with increased funding. Therefore the increased financial burden of higher education in Ireland on the exchequer and ultimately the tax payer due to a move from elite to mass education, and subsequently increased access and participation rates on courses across HEIs, has led to increased policies of efficiencies, quality and standards (Hazelkorn, 2013). Institutes of Technology (IoTs) also face the possibility of further downsizing and staff reductions and the inevitable reduction in finances will see cost reduction exercises and the reintroduction of students fees (National Strategy for Higher Education in Ireland to 2030, HEA (Hunt, 2011)).

The HEA have set other targets for HEIs including advancing the internationalisation agenda and increasing participation from disadvantaged communities. The target for non-EU fee paying students for 2020 is 15% of the total FTE (full time equivalent) student population. The current figure in the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) is approximately 3% but would be lower for the Dublin Technological Universities (DTU) alliance. Other measures of internationalisation being used by the HEA are proportion of international staff to domestic staff and the proportion of internationally co-authored research papers. However, despite the increased participation in higher education over recent years there still exists significant inequity of access. The Institutes of Technology (IoT) Act (1992), followed closely by the Universities Act (1997), led the way towards access and equal opportunities for students by allowing more places on higher education courses and introduction a free fees initiative (DoES, 2013) for higher education students. Following this the Institutes of Technology Act (2006) require institutions to have equality of access policies in place for people from sections of society who are under-represented in higher education. Previous to this the Higher Education Authority Act (1971) required the HEA to promote equality of

opportunity in higher education and to review equality policies. The Universities have surpassed the Institutes where access and equal opportunities are concerned. Since 2007, Ireland witnessed a slowdown in the increased participation at higher levels; 2007 saw a 7% increase; 2008 witnessed an 8% increase; but in 2009 this increase was only 1% (O'Connor, 2010). This is also reflected in McGuinness, Bergin, Kelly, McCoy, Smyth, and Timoney's (2012) report of a 7% increase in 2010/2011 with a further projected year on year increase by 2030.

This, together with other government policies, has resulted in what we are witnessing today of the 'massification' of the higher education sector. This would pose the question, is higher education in Ireland at capacity already and can higher education sustain increases in the future? Many forces of change call for a more flexibly managed institution which would involve many change agents within the organisation being management, staff and students alike driving and steering the changes (Clark, 1972). However, resources and conditions that support HEIs become more and more limited while the services demanded of them and their costs increase and Clark (1998), describes this as 'demand overload'. When HEIs change they change by an institutional version of survival of the fittest or natural selection. Survival is a necessity and all institutions will eventually choose change in order to survive in an economy of growing competitiveness.

### **Dublin Institute of Technology and some Policies**

Following on from the economic recession, the increased costs of doing business together with the increases in participation year on year, the DIT has witnessed many other changes over the years since its inception in 1992. Arising from HEA policy documents (Hunt, 2011), changes are already transpiring within the DIT as it has already undergone some operational structural changes which have seen the old 'Faculties' merging and creating a four 'Colleges'. Some of these changes are also as a result of the organizational

development of DIT, following on from the DIT Act (1992). These six colleges were independent of one another pre 1992. Post 1992, and the DIT Act of that year, they became Faculties and Schools under the governing of the Dublin Institute of Technology, with the establishment of a new site central to all colleges, the new seventh College, at Aungier Street.

The current changes within the Institute moving to one main campus within Dublin have also witnessed many hiccups along the way. The Grangegorman Development Act was established in 2005, but a proposal for a move-in date to the campus in Grangegorman had been postponed under a previous government during the economic recession. However, in July 2010, the same government announced its Government Infrastructure Investment Priorities which outlined that the development of Grangegorman would still go ahead as planned. However, in the budget of 2011/2012 this was put on hold once again. This was re-established at the end of 2012 under a new government and currently there is a staggered move in date, which commenced in September 2014 with the first 1100 students and staff arriving on campus from the School of Art, Design and Printing. This is only one School of the new Colleges and therefore the logistics of multiple sites around the city remain.

The Grangegorman (GG) move recently started moving in tandem with the Dublin Technological Universities Alliance (DTUA) (2012 to date) but it has taken many years to strategically plan since its inception in 2005. The Minister for Education and Science signed the order, giving effect to the Institutes of Technology Act 2006 with effect from the 1st September 2007; as a consequence the DIT became a designated institution under the HEA. The reorganisation of DIT was initiated in 2007 as a consultation process on the overall restructuring of DIT. The DTU which has become one of the first alliances arising from the Hunt report (2011) has currently stalled since the last election (2016). All of this has many implications of the influence of change on culture and identities.



### **Culture and Identities**

Clark (1972) viewed the culture emanating from colleges as fitting into five main categories. The personnel core, which reflected the employees' subculture, disciplines or identity; the student subculture, the alumni and the campus ideals; the program core, reflecting elements of learning and teaching practices within the institution; the college or educational institution's ideology itself, and the social base, reflecting the society within which the college functioned. Each of Clark's cultures provides elements of excellence, equity and enterprise within the culture or combination of cultures found in higher education. Clark (1983) further developed a triangle of co-ordination to illustrate how order can emerge from the complexity of higher education systems that encompass many different facets, cultures and forms of authority from the state, market and academia. He referred to these as ideal types.

In examining definitions of organizational culture, it is a set of shared values, shared beliefs and customary ways of thinking and doing things, which shape the organisation and its members (Schein, 2010). Understanding institutional culture leads to a greater awareness of the functioning of an institution, from its mission and vision statements and leadership roles to the subcultures and disciplines, and identities of their staff. Therefore, an examination of the research of an institutions' culture has shown that culture can help in understanding individual and collective identities and subcultures within the institution. Academics essentially enter into a cultural institution consisting of the profession as the institution and professional discourse (academic or habitual) within this field. It is constantly changing as the institution travels through time and influenced by what that period brings with it. This then becomes increasingly difficult to sway as policy changes expose higher education to further disruptions and changes to its culture. This also affects the continuity and change of professional academic identities. Fundamentally when attempting to change

an institution, the culture of the institution is in flux, the behaviours, beliefs and assumptions of the institution may change, and the personality of the institution will evolve. It is evident from the literature that this is the norm (Clark, 1972; Cohen & March, 1974; Bate, 1995; Becher & Trowler, 2001; Silver, 2003).

As higher education institutions undergo significant changes, academics and their identities drive to adapt and change alongside. Academic professional identities are influenced both prior to entering an institution and what happens during their career, and how they are influenced over time due to student cohorts and institutional cultures (Henkel, 2010; Flores & Day, 2006). There have been strong pressures placed on academics, communities and institutions not only to change their cultures and structures to enable the changes to occur in relation to policy shifts and the global crisis, but also to review their management of academics duties and roles, and cultures within these institutions. Change inevitably involves loss, anxiety and struggle because it can strike at the core of cultures, professional identities, and disciplines.

### **Research Question Directing this Research**

The Hunt Report (2011) emphasises the need for forward and strategic thinking in relation to the future of higher education in Ireland, and recognised the need for HEI in Ireland to be able to compete on an international scale and also to be able to develop programmes for national innovation. Some of the recommendations arising from the report also indicate structural changes to assist in developing a critical mass in HEI, together with diverse and flexible deliveries for the new learner. There is also a strong emphasis for engagement with society, be it globally or locally, be it the potential student or potential graduate, and the market and industry within which the student will gain employment, to further understand what is required of the new international and national student and graduate (Hunt, 2011).

The consequences of the plethora of reports and policies coming from Europe, our national government and also driven within individual institutes, is continuous change in higher education, which some may view as lifelong changes and developments. There is a growing awareness that managing change is of paramount importance and that careful consideration of the cultural landscape in higher education institutions must be measured in order for higher education institutions to survive, grow and develop and be able to compete internationally in education. The changes within the landscape of higher education from global to local level have led to the question directing this research.

Therefore, the main research question directing this study is:

How is the phenomenon of higher education change in Ireland affecting cultures and professional academic identities in a Higher Education Institute (HEI)?

The Dublin Institute of Technology, the largest Institute of Technology in Ireland, will be used as a case study.

From this a set of research questions emerge:

1. What are the drivers of change in the higher education landscape in Ireland?
2. What are the drivers for change within the Dublin Institute of Technology?
3. What is the culture of the Dublin Institute of Technology, and are the changes outlined influencing this?
4. Are the changes also influencing professional academic identities in the Dublin Institute of Technology?

### **Methods**

The methodology is a micro case study, which takes place within the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), the largest Institute of Technology in Ireland. The case study is of a College in DIT as it experiences mergers prior to moving from traditional multi-site colleges to one main campus 'one DIT' in the heart of Dublin's historical inner city. DIT is a unique higher education Institute in Ireland (the first to be such an institute after the DIT Act in 1992), and a leader in the development of education in this sector founded around some of the first Vocational Education Colleges (VEC) and Technical Colleges in Ireland in the last century. DIT is undergoing major transformation prior to, and during, its move to

Grangegorman, while simultaneously forming an alliance to become the first Technological University (TU) in Dublin and Ireland. It is for this purpose (Miles & Huberman, 1994) that this research employs a case study during a particular and crucial point in time in Irish higher education within the IoTs, in particular within DIT from 2010 – 2014, using multi-method qualitative research tools.

The changes proposed by Grangegorman, and the transition of DIT preceding the move to one campus, are heavily dependent on the government in power, the funding that is available and the culture and attitude towards this change within the Institute. The changes already underway, the increased student participation to increase finances, reduction in personnel due to successive policies of economic efficiency, and the internal drive towards becoming a new TU, and the influence all of this may have on culture and identity is the focus of this research.

The investigation makes use of a qualitative research design, comprising semi-structured interviews, together with documentary analysis via discourse employed in policies and strategies. Documents were analysed using critical discourse analysis (CDA) according to McCulloch (2004) and Fairclough (1993). Interviews took place with academic staff involved in the change process to ascertain the internal actors' perception of this change. The interviews used a narrative analysis similar to that employed by Ylijoki and Ursin (2013). Figure 5.1 (Appendix 2) illustrates the process involved in this research. It begins with exposure to the concepts of changes and mergers during School meetings and continues with literature searches to establish a research question to frame the study. The research question informed the philosophy, the methodology and methods of the research, which are later outlined in this chapter. Documents were gathered and analysed and interviews employed to collect data for use in the research.

### **Policy Documents and Analysis**

As previously outlined above, policy documents in higher education in Ireland since the 1970's have emphasised issues of social inclusion, increased participation and knowledge creation and innovation as the norm. Figure 6.1 (Appendix 3) illustrates the documents analysed as part of this research. These policy decisions alone have had major implications on culture and identity. It also suggests that the influences of change originate at state and HEA level, and disseminated down to Institute level via policy documents. These are then adapted into the Institute's own strategic plans or policies for implementation. Even though there is evidence that many of the drivers of change are coming from the state, more evidence that is recent suggests that the influence coming from the IoTs forming the proposed TU for Dublin. Table 6.1 (Appendix 3) illustrates some of the discourse emanating from the documents reviewed and those involved. Communication of the changes are generally conducted via the plans or mission statements but are also conducted via formal communication from the President's office. This in turn further emphasises both the cultural influence from the state and from within the Institute via the leader.

### **Narratives**

Throughout the interviews, it was clear that all participants had witnessed many types of changes throughout their time in the college, even if they had only started their employment with the Institute. The changes have become more evident and prevalent in recent times since the economic down turn and subsequent budget cuts in higher education. Targeting different levels within the schools provided for a much wider range of responses on each of the topics and within the interview protocol. Each interviewee's contribution to this research is an invaluable insight into the effect of the changes on the culture in the College and their identities. Within each topic discussed, narratives were used to frame the stories within. The narratives provide a structure for the findings under the research questions and

objectives outlined earlier in chapter four. The proposed change initiative comprised what is considered to be a micro-merger but driven from government policies, and so questions ranged from what was happening at national level down to what was affecting staff in their work place and how this was affecting their role, discipline and professional identity. Table 7.1 (Appendix 4) illustrates in part the topics, themes and meta-discourse emerging from the interviews. Further narratives and stories emerged from which the research could be framed.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The main findings indicated that the external policy drivers of change came from the DIT Act (1992) and the Grangegorman Development Act (2005), with further amendments in 2006. Further to these very specific DIT policies were HEA reports referring to structural and sectoral changes such as collaborations, alliances and mergers (Hunt, 2011) due to recommendations of economic efficiencies of the time (McCarthy, 2009). These have also resulted in redundancies, early retirements and possible redeployment of existing staff (Haddington Road, 2013) with recommendations of TU4Dublin (General Framework, 2014).

The influence from these proposals, especially the proposed merger have been felt internal to DIT with inclusion of words of ‘critical mass’ and ‘future campus’ at Grangegorman in internal strategic documents, College plans and currently under review at School levels. The influence and vision of the leaders are important (Seyranian, 2013; Askling & Henkel, 2000), and is evident in internal mission statements endorsing government policies of student participation and resulting in increasing numbers. This has also led to information technology (IT) solutions of flexible deliveries but also IT skills required by industry, where the importance of engagement with industry sector stakeholders was paramount. These changes and mergers certainly influenced the culture of DIT, endorsing Whitchurch and Gordon (2013), but most interviewees agreed that they could only speculate what it might become once over in Grangegorman campus either under DTU or under DIT.

Currently they emphasised the history and culture of DIT, where independent colleges once merged to become DIT, remain mainly independent of DIT, influencing the myriad patchwork (Bate, 1995) of cultures.

Interviewees did, however, remain positive in that it was collegial and student centred with a bureaucratic overtone because of its centralised and hierarchical control, which endorses Clark's (1972) saga theory and other research into change in education (Clark, 1998; 2004; 2007). Interviewees stated there was a culture of conflict and confusion supporting Becher and Trowler, (2001), which is indicative of large organisations of having an organised anarchy endorsing Cohen and March (1974; Silver, 2003). Understanding of culture was the first step in understanding identity and interviewees spoke with multiple narratives and multiple identities. The experience they had prior to becoming part of DIT, their discipline, the people they gravitate towards in communities of practice or social interaction all influenced who they are. Sometimes they were a 'teacher', an 'academic', a 'researcher' or a specific discipline. This research concurs with McInnis (2010; 2012), Henkel (2005; 2010; 2012) and Flores and Day's (2006) research.

However, with the influence of the changes outlined earlier, interviewees expressed their sense of insecurity and loss due to work overload and administration. This sometimes meant that they spent less time in front of students (Henkel, 2010; 2012), or that they might have lost their discipline, their role, or their identity. This led to a feeling of confusion and isolation where identifying with Institute could no longer happen and therefore they became independent to the Institute. It was also apparent that there were individuals who separated themselves from the Institute in terms of identifying who they were at the outset and they indicated that the changes only endorsed this sense of separation.

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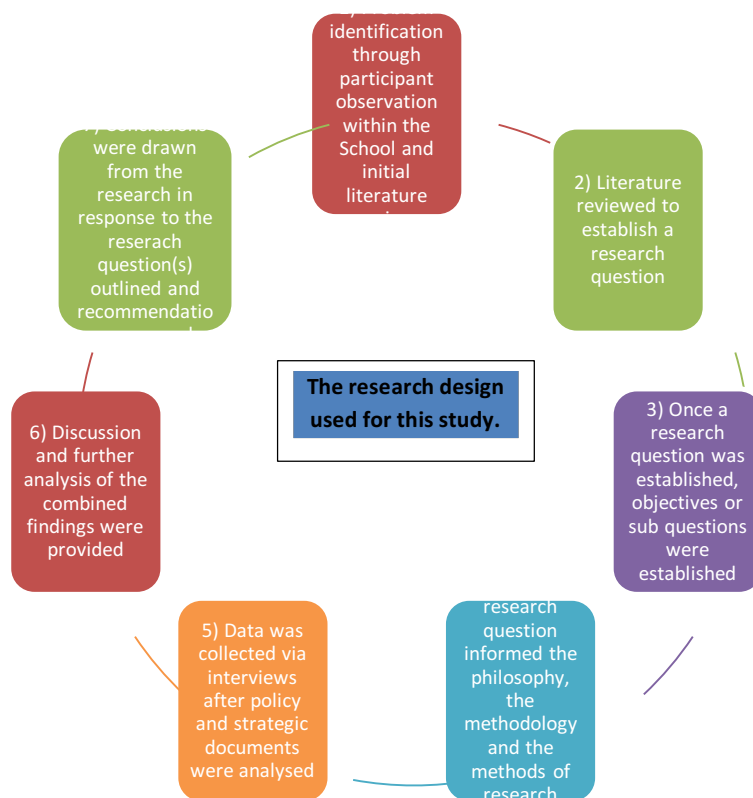
## Appendix 1

Table 2.1. *PEST Analysis of Change Drivers*

P	<b>Policy</b>	Government ideologies and policies, influence DIT's strategies and resulting in diverse student populations and increased participation.
E	<b>Economy</b>	Change in taxation, rates, funding and levies influence the possible reintroduction of student fees.
S	<b>Society</b> (including culture)	Expectations of students and industry influencing delivery innovations within DIT; Becoming more 'market focused'/'student centred' education.
T	<b>Technology</b>	New digital 'savvy' student generation; The digital age; Challenges to traditional teaching methods.

Source: Adapted from Doherty, Steel and Parrish (2012).

## Appendix 2

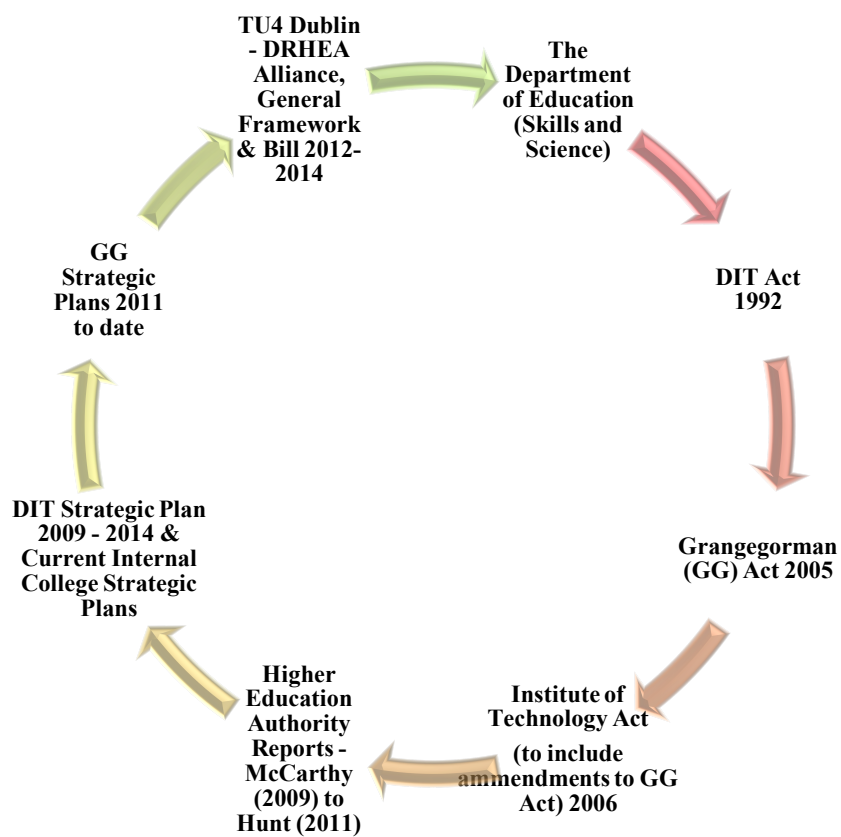


*Figure 5.1.* Research Process and Design

Source: Adapted from Cohen, et al., 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011.



## Appendix 3

*Figure 6.1. Policies Analysed*

## Appendix 3 Continued

Table 6.1: *Policy & Documents*

Policy/ Document	DIT Act 1992	DIT Strategy	College Plans	Grangegorman (GG)	TU4Dublin
<b>Discourse</b>	Amalgamation of Colleges  Establishment of DIT  Hierarchy and organisational restructuring  Students  Staffing  Knowledge economy  Globalisation	Pillars:  Learning  Research  Engagement  Student Services  People  Organisational Development	Same pillars as the strategy  Creativity, innovation, flexible, unique, etc.	Restructuring  Economic & social development  Collegiality  Leader vision  Staff consultation, participation, involvement	Reflects all of the previous plans plus the McCarthy & Hunt reports which suggest:  Collaborations, amalgamations & restructuring of the HE sector.
<b>Who's involved</b>	All the Heads of the independent CDVE Colleges merging at the time, together with student representatives & the government minister from the DoES.	All staff and students within DIT	All staff and students within the respective Colleges	Board representatives appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills	The Steering Group represent the 3 IoTs proposing to merge in Dublin

## Appendix 4

Table 7.1. *Topics, themes and meta-discourse*

Topics from the literature	Research questions	Themes for discussion	Meta-discourse
Change and Mergers – HE driving forces PEST	What are the drivers of change in the higher education landscape in Ireland	Questions on change in Higher Education	(P) Policies (named); Reports about consolidation;  (E) Economy; Efficiencies; Cut backs.  (S) Massification; Overcrowding; New types of students; New generations;  (T) New expectations of delivery; Drive for more research
Internal Driving Forces – mergers, resisters, leaders, strategies	What are the drivers for change within the Dublin Institute of Technology	Questions on change in DIT	Mergers - New Institute structures; Engagement with industry; Drive for TU requires more research; Competition from other IoTs requiring a critical mass;  Resisters - Lack of resources; No time allocation for research;  Leaders & strategies - Leader(ship) are important; Change agents are important; Consultation is important
Cultures, Subcultures & communities	In what way, are changes influencing the culture of the Dublin Institute of Technology?	Questions relating to culture and change	Collegial; Community;  Bureaucracy; Hierarchy;  Cliques; Silos; Satellites; Independent;  Resisters; Suspicious; Lifers; Anarchistic; Power struggles
Identity	In what way, are the changes also influencing professional academic identities in the Dublin Institute of Technology	Questions relating to identity and change	Teacher; Lecturer; Academic;  Manager; Admin;  Consultant; Researcher;  Individual; Loss of identity; Withdraw; Distinct life from here;  Overloaded with work so confused; Are we an IoT or a University?; Confusion; Frustration; Embarrassed; Disrespected; Powerless; Separate